

Open Educational Resources

An update on activities

Since April 2009, the Higher Education Academy and JISC have been collaborating on the Open Educational Resources (OER) pilot programme, helping universities to share educational materials freely online. This paper gives an overview of what has been achieved to date.

More than 80 UK universities have been involved in the pilot programme. Some are addressing Open Educational Resources within their own university; some are working within subject-based consortia; others are exploring the requirements of individual academics.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) provided an initial £5.7m to fund 29 pilot projects. The programme is supporting these projects to explore processes and policies, intellectual property rights (IPR), cultural issues, technical requirements and data management issues.

The benefits of Open Educational Resources

Making educational resources 'open' broadens their use and enables them to be repurposed. Through Open Educational Resources, students gain access to a broader range of materials to suit different learning styles and obtain a range of perspectives on individual topics. Academic staff can reuse and repurpose materials rather than needing to develop them from scratch. This frees up time to work on aspects of their work where they can truly add value, such as furthering their research and effectively tutoring their students. Sharing quality learning materials in this way can enhance a university's reputation and provide prospective students with a taste of what to expect – a 'shop window' for the university's work. Indeed Open Educational Resources has the potential to enhance the reputation of UK higher education as a whole.

How resources are shared

The kind of educational resources being shared range from lecture notes and audio podcasts of lectures through to collections of images, interactive learning materials and videos.

Universities first identify and agree the ownership of each item, then use Creative Commons copyright licences to enable them to communicate the terms with which they wish to share the resources. JISC Legal has been helping universities modify their IPR policies to allow materials to be more easily shared. In some cases, ethical issues associated with sharing particular images need to be addressed.

Next they upload the resources online. The projects in this programme are required to upload their materials to JorumOpen, a JISC-funded service which enables learning and teaching resources to be shared. A university may also wish to share materials via an institutional repository – a location provided by the university where digital information can be stored and shared. Alternatively, they may wish to use education services such as iTunes U, or websites like YouTube, SlideShare, Flickr and many others. In some cases, RSS web feeds are used; this can improve the circulation of educational resources because teachers and learners can automatically syndicate materials relevant to their own needs. No matter where the educational resources appear, the key is that they are open for others to reuse.

Further information

JISC Open Educational Resources information:
www.jisc.ac.uk/oer

Higher Education Academy Open Educational Resources information:
www.heacademy.ac.uk/oer

JorumOpen:
www.jorum.ac.uk

Follow Open Educational Resources programme activities on Twitter:
www.twitter.com/ukoer
tag: #UKOER

The majority of projects are on course to meet or exceed their content release targets by completion of the pilot programme. Some projects are sharing resources to support specific modules; others are releasing materials from a number of areas of study, supporting the equivalent of one undergraduate degree. The focus of the programme is very much on sustainability, so that universities are able to continue sharing materials at a similar pace beyond the funding period. Many projects have found the most sustainable approach is to put processes in place to empower academics to release their own educational resources, rather than take on the financial burden of building a centralised team to make materials public. Projects have also identified a need to support staff in finding, sharing and using Open Educational Resources and to gain a better understanding of IPR issues.



Open Educational Resources events

OER 10

Clare College, Cambridge, 22-23 March 2010

Representatives of the programme will be participating in presentations, workshops and demonstrations promoting and disseminating best practice in Open Educational Resources.

JISC Conference

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London, 13 April 2010

Open Educational Resources: Breaking boundaries in education. This session will bring together representatives from three of the pilot projects to present their account of how involvement in the Open Educational Resources pilot programme has affected their institutions.

The Higher Education Academy Conference

University of Hertfordshire, 22-23 June 2010

The pilot programme will be launching an infoKit, developed by JISC infoNet, to inform and support universities wishing to share their educational resources openly.

International Open Educational Resources Showcase

Holborn Bars, London, 23 July 2010

This event will showcase the work of the pilot programme and demonstrate how the UK is working towards the sustainable development and delivery of Open Educational Resources.

Technical solutions

During the programme, projects have suggested a number of technical enhancements which could support Open Educational Resources, for example improving the promotion and distribution of materials through search engine optimisation. Projects have also explored the facility to embed Creative Commons licences into a range of materials of varying formats.

JISC CETIS and Jorum have been exploring ways in which to automate the upload of resources into JorumOpen when items are deposited into an institutional repository, thus streamlining the process.

The 'viral' nature of items made available through Creative Commons poses a challenge when it comes to ensuring online materials are up-to-date. The most common solution is to clearly date each item and to provide a link to where the most recent version will be hosted.

A catalyst for change

As well as making more materials freely available online, the Open Educational Resources programme has, in some cases, become a catalyst for a change in the way universities operate. Universities have found solutions to complex intellectual property issues. In order to open up their educational resources, they have had to clarify their processes for creating, managing, approving and accrediting academic materials, and as a consequence have made their systems more efficient. Moreover, making educational resources more visible encourages proactive quality management, especially when material is being used as a marketing tool.